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Petra Kuivala

CATHOLIC MATERIAL CULTURE, SOCIALIST SOCIETY, AND STATE POWER IN CUBA, 1959–1978

The article analyses the histories of Catholic material culture in revolutionary Cuba. It illustrates and discusses how the Cuban Church and individual Catholics have navigated the revolutionary everyday with practices of material religion. Moving from the first years of the Cuban Revolution (1959 onwards) to the late 1970s, the article presents and analyses examples of the ways in which material religion has intersected with the state ideology, politics, and the performance of the Revolution in Cuba. Additionally, the article discusses the meanings given to material representations of religion in the revolutionary reality by Cuban Catholics themselves: how religious material culture has constituted a means for Catholics to navigate the juxtaposition of religious worldviews and the socialist state power.

Keywords: Cuba; revolution; Catholicism; material culture; material religion; Catholic material culture

Since 1961, the Marxist worldview officially sanctioned by the Cuban revolutionary government entailed a paradigm of material atheism: the negation of transcendence and religiosity as dimensions of the revolutionary culture. Yet within Cuban culture and society, Catholicism portrayed a competing worldview based on the profound conviction of the transcendent in the everyday of the Revolution, including a myriad of material representations, traditionally held in high esteem in quotidian practices of the Catholic faith.

At the centre of this article is the interplay of material religion with materialism and atheism as state-sanctioned ideological features of the Cuban Revolution. In order to analyse the intertwined histories of material Catholicism and the post-revolutionary state power that directed the ideological course of the Revolution, the article employs both written and oral sources. The written sources, appearing in scholarship for the first time, were housed in the archives of the Catholic Church in Cuba.[1] The eleven oral histories included in the analysis are individual accounts of life in the socialist society by Cuban Catholics.[2] All sources were accessed and collected during 12 months of fieldwork in Cuba at numerous locations between 2014 and 2020.

The article is situated at the intersection of several academic disciplines, such as the study of theology and religion, history, material culture, and the multidisciplinary field of Cuban studies. In the scholarship on religious material culture, or material religion, numerous studies focus on Catholic material culture in both historical and contemporary contexts. However, religion, as well as material culture, remain underexplored in Cuban studies despite its potential for providing new conceptual and analytical frameworks to the field as well as new perspectives to Cuban social history.

In the scholarship on Cuba, religion in the Revolution has been predominantly approached from the perspectives of institutional and institutionalised histories, resulting from the lack of analyses of both Catholic primary sources and individual and lived histories of religion within the revolutionary reality on the island. Another dominant framework for discussing religion in the Cuban Revolution has been through the exile and diasporic Catholicism in the United States.[3] By conceptualising religion as an intersectional phenomenon, the present analysis of religious material culture provides new perspectives for an in-depth analysis of the cultural undercurrents that bridge the institutional histories and individual experiences of the Revolution.

The study of material culture – as well as representations of materiality – is, as the article shows, particularly relevant as it bridges the institutionalised and normative dimensions of religion with the multiple layers of lived experiences, microhistories, and more fluid forms of religiosity.[4] As the case of Catholicism in Cuba – particularly in the revolutionary setting – demonstrates, religious material culture played a significant role in enabling physical, corporeal, and bodily expressions of transcendent worlds in the lives of the believers, and in the cultural, social, and political daily contexts of the Revolution.

In the Catholic faith, material elements serve to connect the believers to the divine and to transcendence via practices of worship, such as through the rosary used in prayer. *Material religion* as a term refers to the manifestations and representations of religion in material culture, such as religious artefacts and sacred spaces, and to the religious practices that employ material forms, such as liturgy, rituals, and prayer (Miller 2015, 1–3). According to religion scholar Amy Whitehead, "material religion is *anything* that can be seen, touched, smelled, felt, tasted, and heard in multitudes of forms of religious expression" (2013, 23). In the scholarship on material religion, an essential focus is the interplay and interaction of religion and material culture, which can include both religious and non-religious material cultures, such as the revolutionary and socialist contexts in Cuba.

Material religion in the Revolution of 1959

In 1959, following the establishment of the revolutionary rule, Cuban Catholics navigated and negotiated their faith within the revolutionary setting as a simultaneously deeply personal and collective experience. At the early stage, the religious and revolutionary identities were mutually inclusive and intertwined, embodied by overlapping material cultures. In 1959 and 1960, material Catholicism was openly expressed

Figure 1 A procession in Old Havana in 1959. Picture courtesy of the Historical Archive of the Archdiocese of Havana (Archivo Histórico de la Arquidiocesis de La Habana).

in the public sphere of Cuban society. It flourished also in commercial spaces, such as stores selling religious items, such as rosaries and medals, spiritual literature, rugs with religious imagery and other decorative items. In Havana, artefacts related to receiving the sacraments and expressing a devotion of saints were widely available and in use, some imported from Europe, particularly from Spain.[5]

In the course of 1959, Cubans defined the future of the Revolution, together with its political and ideological premises.[6] The institutional Church attempted to influence the process: aside from publications by the episcopal hierarchy and public debates organised by the leading lay associations, a significant means was the display of material religion connected to national identity in public spaces. At the same time, the Revolution began to produce a material culture[7] of its own. The early revolutionary imaginary frequently included religious material representations, which were intended to obtain legitimacy and popular support among the nation.[8] In this construction of a new revolutionary ethos and national identity, religious beliefs and revolutionary affiliations were not antagonists but mutually inclusive. Figure 1 shows one of the processions organised by the Church in Havana in 1959.

As the image shows, members of the revolutionary army participated in the procession carrying the float. Their fatigue uniforms and firearms gave visibility to the Revolution in this religious event.[9] In the crowd, lay Catholics wore distinctively Catholic clothing, such as the *mantilla* scarves worn by women. As a gender-specific piece of clothing, the *mantilla* resonated with the Catholic idea of femininity and motherhood held in high esteem among the Catholic communities in Cuba.[10]

As the procession also shows, in Cuba, a particular vein of Marian advocacy centred Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, Cuba's Catholic patron saint and a motherly symbol of the nation.[11] The effigy of the Virgen, a small statue with a bright yellow mantle and a golden crown, was a personification of both faith and culture, connecting the Marian devotion directly to national identity across race, gender, and age as well as ideological and political affiliations in both pre- and post-revolutionary periods.[12]

In the revolutionary period, the Virgen de la Caridad continued to embody a long-standing history of national identity and cross-generational spirituality merging Catholic material representations, devotional practices, and socio-political discourses. The National Shrine Basilica in the village of El Cobre, near the town of Santiago de Cuba, is the primary site of material Catholicism on the island (Schmidt 2015, 197–200). With its pre-eminence as Cuba's devotional centre dating to the pre-revolutionary era, the shrine of El Cobre also represented a formidable passage in continuity for Cuban religiosity, spirituality, and material culture that wove the pre-1959 histories of Catholic devotion into the Revolution's history.

In November 1959, the largest Catholic mass demonstration revolved around the effigy of the Virgen de la Caridad. Following the mounting concerns of the episcopate and socially conscious lay organisations regarding the political direction of the Revolution, the November event was an attempt to, first, summon all Catholics to publicly demonstrate their support for the Church and, second, present a Catholic input on debating the future of the Revolution, drawing on the support of the Cuban people (Kuivala 2019, 89–95).

In a procession that took over the streets of Havana, the original effigy of the Virgen de la Caridad led the way for the procession. The statue, adorned with flowers inside a glass box, was brought from her sanctuary in Santiago de Cuba to the other end of the island and escorted through Havana by a large crowd. A commemorative book of the event recounted that, like in the image above, "members of the revolutionary Army carried their precious load to the altar, commencing the Mass".[13] In their olive-green apparel, the revolutionary troops again formed an honorary guard, which publicly affiliated the Revolution to the Virgen and the large group of Catholics gathered on Plaza Cívica.

After the congress, the Virgen was accompanied on her way to the airport from the city centre by a group of Catholics on foot.[14] The visible, tangible presence of *la patrona* (the patron saint) served to remind the nation of its own Catholic roots. At the same time, it also served to remind the revolutionary leadership of the hegemonic Catholic influence in society at the early stages of the Revolution. She was presented by the Church as an intersectional material embodiment of both religious and patriotic convictions, social consciousness, and political commitment. Yet as such, the Virgin was also a politically threatening material representation, as the events of November 1959 showed that the Revolution was not the only idea and symbol capable of mobilising and uniting Cubans. A small effigy, a material representation of transcendent belief and collective identity, was potentially capable of mobilising the citizenry after an idea other than the revolutionary ethos

Catholicism and ideal citizenry in the 1960s

In 1961, the Cuban government adopted a socialist political framework, together with Marxism as the officially sanctioned state ideology (Pérez-Stable 2012, 66, 86–87). After the initial stage of mutual inclusiveness of Catholic and revolutionary ethos, the radicalisation of the Revolution gave rise to a series of conflicts between the Church and the government that resulted in the public opinion turning against the compatibility of religion and the Revolution. Consequently, the long-standing tradition of material religion in the public sphere on the island was ultimately challenged by the socialist framework developed by the post-revolutionary regime. Ideologically central to the juxtaposing of material religion and the revolutionary culture was the atheist worldview inscribed in Cuban state-socialist ideology.

The negative stance on religion and publicly expressed religiosity suppressed the presence and use of material religion in public spaces. An often-repeated phrase by Cuban Catholics to describe the new parameters that defined the practice of the Catholic faith in Cuban society since the introduction of socialism was *dentro de los templos*, translating as "inside the church buildings".[15] The expression defined the limits of Catholic religiosity and spirituality in the revolutionary public space. It referred directly to the policies of the government oriented the public presence and social domain of the Church, which was meant to a civic actor but only a spiritual community. Church buildings thus became both a material marker, a frontier, and a representation distinguishing accepted from unaccepted religious expressions in the socialist society.

At the same time, *dentro de los templos* became a material marker for the self-constructed identity of Catholic communities and the official ecclesial thought of the institutional Church: it referred not only to the role allowed to the Church by the Cuban state but also to the experience of agency and participation that Catholics endured in revolutionary Cuba. In a more concrete sense, the expression conveyed the material dimensions of the power struggle between the Church and the state.

As such, the expression was also connected to the shifting definitions of ownership on the island in 1960 and 1961, namely to the confiscation of ecclesial premises such as churches and convents, and the nationalisation of church-run schools and hospitals.[16] In a theological and spiritual sense, the church building provides an experience of sacred presence to local communities. In the religious meaning-making experiences of Cuban Catholics, the sacramentality of the buildings confiscated and nationalised was thus violated;[17] furthermore, the violation of the sacramentality of the buildings was experienced as a violation of the religious community and their existential beliefs.[18]

The nationalisation and confiscation of ecclesial premises is again linked to the unfolding struggle for authority. By reducing the property of the Church, the Cuban authorities made visible the new power relations between Church and State, and the authority of the government to seize and, consequently, determine the material resources of religious institutions. For the Catholic Church in Cuba, the struggle over religious material culture became a global issue, as the Holy

See[19] began to negotiate with the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MINREX) the control and ownership of the Church of its property.[20]

Among the Holy See's most significant areas of negotiation with the Cuban authorities was the nationalisation of Catholic buildings and ecclesial premises. Many of the interventions were executed through the apostolic nunciature, the Holy See's diplomatic representation in the country. When the revolutionary government seized control of a convent in Old Havana, for instance, Cesare Zacchi, the Holy See's representative to Cuba, mediated the controversy and managed to keep half of the building for the use of the religious order while the other half was placed under state control.[21] Central to the Holy See's effort was to guarantee and preserve the control of the local Church regarding its own buildings, artefacts, and overall material religion, and thus to assert its own autonomy vis-à-vis the revolutionary state.

Simultaneously with the struggle over buildings and sites of religious expression, the new definition of discourses on citizenry, revolutionary agency, and state power were juxtaposed with religiosity as an accepted dimension of social behaviour and public expression. To the early discourse on ideal revolutionary participation, material religion had provided a distinctively Catholic input. The members of Catholic lay associations had assured the public of their simultaneously Catholic social consciousness and commitment to the construction of *la patria* (the fatherland) in the evolving revolutionary process, arguing for the compatibility of the two. In the continuing public debates about the course of the Revolution and the mounting criticism of it by the Church, lay Catholics did so with visible symbols such as flags, pins, and patches, in which symbols such as a cross, a star, and the shape of the Cuban island were presented together.[22]

Yet during 1960 and early 1961, as the institutional Church was becoming disaffiliated from the state, the lay associations continued to underscore their Catholic social participation by promoting their own flags, religious insignia, and prayer cards, leaflets, and posters designed to boost the religious convictions of Cubans.[23] These artefacts also included patriotic and nationalistic symbols such as the Cuban flag.

In this respect, the socialist radicalisation of the Revolution made it impossible to accommodate both revolutionary and Catholic identities and express them publicly through overlapping material cultures. In the socialist society, the government restrained religion by limiting the social domain and visibility of religious institutions. As has been discussed by historian Lillian Guerra (2012), among others, Cubanness and ideal citizenry became synonymous with support of the revolutionary regime.[24] Correspondingly, identities that were perceived as contrary to socialism, such as theistic worldviews and religiosity, were increasingly met with criticism and repudiation.

In the socialist society, it was demanded of individuals that they not display material considered antirevolutionary and, consequently, unpatriotic. While a significant proportion of lay Catholics, working-age adults in particular, became estranged from religion as a result of their commitment to the Revolution, the tightening social norms led to involuntary alienation from institutional religion as well (Kuivala 2019, 120). Hiding or even disposing of private religious artefacts,

especially in public, was another consequence of the state-sanctioned irreconcilability of religion and the revolutionary regime, and the consequent privatisation of religion in individual Cubans' lives.

As consequence of both the alienation and the fear experienced by believers, lay Catholics began to clear their homes of religious items. Some erased any trace of material religion from domestic spaces as a public act of commitment to the Revolution. Others moved them to locations in which they could not be easily discovered by the local authorities of the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (*Comités de Defensa de la Revolución*, *CDR*), established by the government as a system of neighbourhood vigilance.[25] Statues of Jesus and saints were hidden in cupboards and pantries, among groceries. This contributed significantly to the privatisation of religiosity (Kuivala 2019, 115, 190, 191, 194), mostly limiting the material representations of religion to the domestic and intimate spheres of life.

In the Catholic faith, material objects often have a particular role of both transmitting and containing divine and sacramental presence. According to historian Deirdre de la Cruz, this is an exchange in which "the tangible mediation of holy presence belongs not only to devotional objects but to devotional subjects as well" (de la Cruz 2019). For instance, statues and relics of saints convey the presence of the transcendent to the believer venerating them at a side altar in a church or in her own house. This explains why it became increasingly important for some Catholics to convey their faith by publicly displaying devotional religious symbols within the tightened frameworks of accepted social behaviour that increasingly excluded religion from the Cuban public sphere.

In Havana, for instance, grandmothers audaciously placed statues of Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and La Caridad by the windows, facing the street.[26] In a small town in rural Cuba, a layman entered a church occupied by the local revolutionary authorities to rescue the sacred artefacts in the sacristy, such as consecrated Eucharistic substances, which then consumed among Catholics in private homes.[27] In another town, a group of parishioners sat in a church through the night, praying and clutching their rosaries to keep the revolutionary army from entering the building.[28] As clergy and religious orders were not able to visit the nationalised hospitals, and would have stood out among the masses in their distinctive religious clothing, groups of laity hid their rosaries and cross pendants under their shirts when they visited the sick. Concealing pieces of paper that contained prayers or passages of the Bible among quotidian artefacts, the visits to the hospitals constituted everyday acts of resistance within the socialist society.[29]

As the examples suggest, Catholic artefacts provided a contesting form of discourse in the public space of the Revolution. While Catholics used material artefacts as a medium for spirituality, religious expressions also served a performative function in the construction of public citizenry in the revolutionary society. On such occasions, material religion was a mechanism of resistance, and provided a way for believers to defy the constraints imposed on religious practices and Catholics in both their quotidian lives and social networks. In the changing landscapes of the Revolution and religion on the island, Catholics employed religious meaning-making

practices to process the course of the Revolution and the ways in which it affected the lives of individuals, families, and entire religious communities.

Anthropologist E. Frances King proposes that material forms of religious expression may "offer an emotive outlet for those in search of a secure identity – a sense of who they are" (2010, 24). For making sense of the revolutionary experience from a Catholic perspective, material religion provided both a sense of agency and a threatening form of affiliation outside the accepted frameworks of citizenry through visible representations and public identification. On a more intimate level, material religion resonated with deeply personal and emotional beliefs, thoughts, and experiences that did not align straightforwardly with state ideals of citizenry and public participation.

In the context of the Cuban Revolution, rosaries, prayer cards, and other small tokens of spirituality allowed individuals to communicate with the transcendent. Asking for divine intermediation, intervention, and providence in the course of events and the evolving revolutionary reality of everyday life, Catholics employed material religion to make sense of the changing life trajectories, values, and belonging in a society which they struggled to recognise as their own. In Matanzas, militant members of Catholic Action distributed prayer cards to neighbours, encouraging Catholics to express their beliefs publicly (Figure 2).[30]

Rephrasing Fidel Castro's revolutionary rhetoric, the cards declared: "With God, everything; without God, nothing."[31] As Castro's words "within the Revolution, everything. Against the Revolution, nothing" had defined the core of the Revolution's cultural politics, the paraphrasing of the statement by the Church marked a crucial point of opposition. The message of the Church was that faith surpassed the ethos of the Revolution as a source of legitimate power and authority in society. As such, the prayer cards were a call for Catholics to adhere to the authority of the Church rather than to that of the revolutionary leadership or state.

At the same time, the prayer cards expressed a call to harness prayer as a spiritual medium into the process through which Catholics also tried to make sense of the Revolution. Using faith as a category for reasoning and religious affiliation as a primary social identity, the Church attempted to encourage the faithful to publicly prioritise religion over the Revolution. As a material expression of their choice, families were asked to ornate their front doors with stickers declaring their houses "a place of prayer",[32] thus defying also the parameters for accepted social behaviour. The effort emphasised also the role of the domicile as a semi-public space for faith, resisting the policies of the government that sought to exclude religion from the public sphere.

In a more direct commentary on the social policies of the government, Catholic Action launched a campaign promoting Christian family values in 1961. Groups of lay Catholics distributed leaflets in residential areas, as an attempt to counter the government's policies on family and gender. By emphasising traditional Catholic teaching on family and gender roles, the campaign responded to the new policies of the regime such as the mobilisation of women into workforce and of the youth into ideological organisations and clubs as well as educational missions such as the Literacy Campaign.

As the examples show, the juxtaposition of the public performance of the Revolution and the ways individuals navigated the newly established social norms

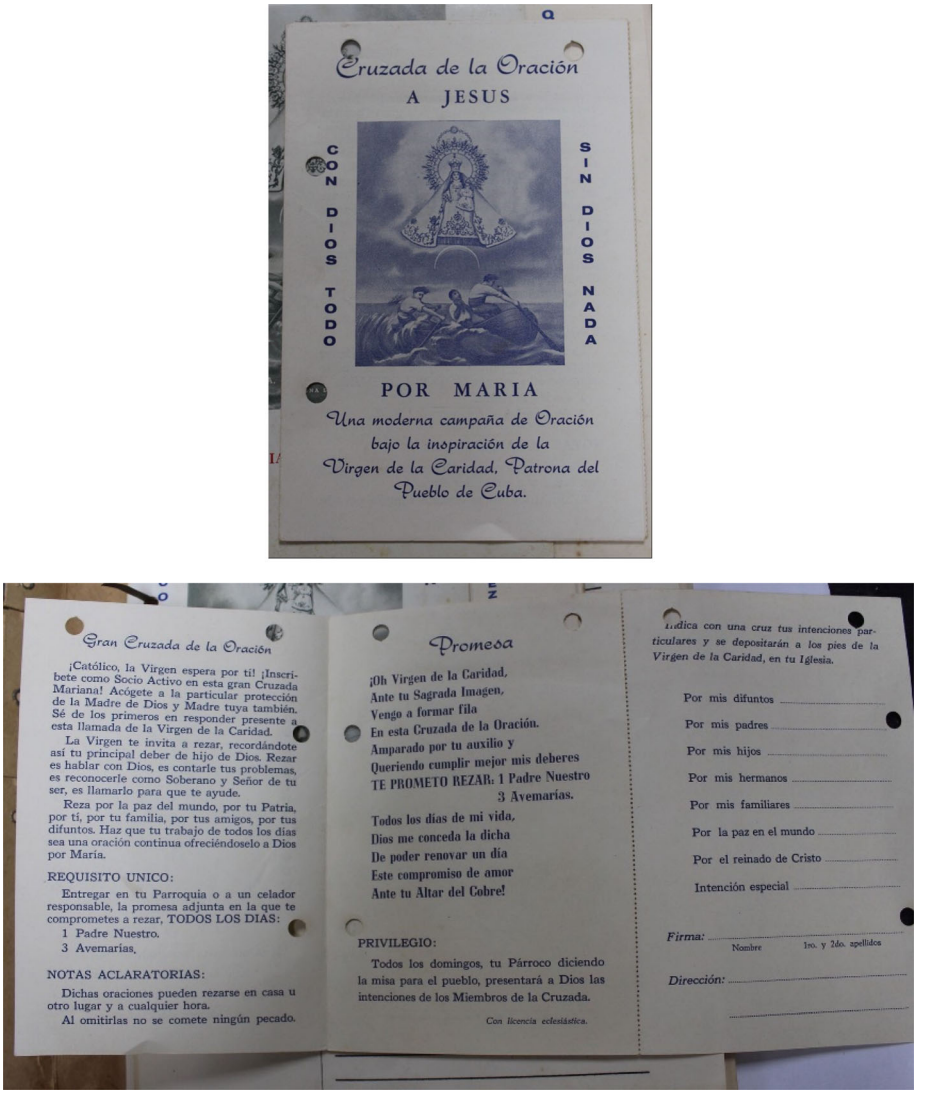

Figure 2 The prayer card distributed by the groups of Catholic Action in Matanzas in 1961. Picture courtesy of the Historical Archive of the Archdiocese of Havana (Archivo Histórico de la Arquidiocesis de La Habana).

were both reflected in and constructed by material culture. For lay Catholics opposing the socialist turn of the Revolution, items as small as a rosary or a card with the image of a saint became symbols of resilience and resistance. Prayer cards distributed in Havana, for instance, promoted Catholic values and social ethics; calls to collectively pray the rosary for the future of the fatherland linked Catholicism to the revolutionary ethos.[33]

This notwithstanding, by the mid-1960s, the Catholic Church and practising Catholics had been excluded from the state-sanctioned framework of citizenry and were considered both anti-revolutionary and anti-patriotic (Pérez-Stable 2012, 85).

In this context, organised Catholic movements appeared not only political but also potentially dangerous for the consolidation of the Revolution (Kuivala 2019, 146, 167–168). Consequently, the public spaces of the Revolution suppressed the material representations of patriotic religious identities and Catholic lay groups omitted them themselves, in order to protect themselves and their livelihoods. For instance, in September 1965, the national leaders of Cuba's largest and most influential lay Catholic association, Acción Católica Cubana, issued a recommendation to local committees to refrain from publicly using any visible, material signs of affiliation to the association.[34] In 1967, the entire association was dissolved and transformed into a more spiritual, less organisational structure for lay participation, one no longer linked to material representations that would compete with the revolutionary material culture.

The materiality of accommodation in the 1970s

Materialism and atheism were inscribed in Cuban state socialism as the grounding principles regarding the existential dimension of humanity, negating the possibility of the transcendent. In the socialist Constitution enacted in 1976, scientific materialism was defined as the founding philosophical principle of state ideology.[35] This worldview was taught in both elementary and higher education: state education emphasised sciences, which were considered a counterforce to religious beliefs. At the same time, the state campaigned against religious beliefs through discursive paradigms and rhetoric on ideal citizenry, work, and social commitment. Information on an individual's religious beliefs was a factor in defining educational and professional trajectories and opportunities.[36]

At the same time, the Church struggled to counter state-sanctioned atheism. The 1970s saw a gradual realignment of Catholic self-identification with the Revolution (Crahan 1985; Kuivala 2019, 205, 212–213). While the Constitution of 1976 reinforced material atheism, it also provided frameworks for defining the rights of religious communities, and recognised freedom of religion. Ecclesial communities found new forms of self-determination and agency vis-à-vis the right to publicly express religious worldviews and the social stigmatisation that still constituted everyday experience of religious communities and individuals (Kuivala 2019, 214–216).

Despite the state resisting the visibility of religious people and institutional forms of religiosity in the socialist society, religion persisted as a spiritual, private domain of everyday life. Proving the persistence of Catholicism in the mid- and late 1970s, two decades into socialism, the Cuban Communist Party issued internal guidelines for "overcoming religious beliefs" by conscious efforts that included facilitating individual encounters with believers and attempting to convert them from their faith in God into a new faith in the Revolution through scientific reasoning and rational arguments.[37] Paradoxically, while the revolutionary government attempted to marginalise and, ultimately, eradicate institutional religion, it explicitly allowed religious institutions to operate within state-defined frameworks.

From the mid-1970s on, another paradox in the discourse of the Revolution's insistence on atheism was addressed by Cuban Catholics – the clergy, in particular. Father René David Rosset, a French priest serving as a professor in Cuba's national Catholic seminary, Seminario San Carlos y San Ambrosio, criticised the Revolution's seemingly strict rejection of any worldviews beyond materialist and atheism. According to Rene David, a blind spot for the revolutionary leadership was its inability to recognise and acknowledge a worldview other than scientific materialism, yet at the same time promote the idea of the transcendent in the ethos of the Revolution itself. In the official view of the inevitability of the revolutionary process and the immortality of the Communist Party, the state reinforced the same teleological, religious thinking it claimed to eradicate.[38] The ethos of the party, Father René David pointed out, was thus not founded in atheism but in an ideal of transcendence that was at the base of the legitimacy of the Revolution and the very existence of the party.

By the mid-1970s, a period begins in which the Church increasingly searched to accommodate the surrounding socio-political context. An emblematic sign of this development is that seminarians and young clergy on the island decided against wearing the formal clerical vestments in their daily ecclesial life. Historically, the soutane, the long black robe worn by Catholic clerics predominantly until the 1960s, represented and portrayed the priests' distinctive role in and disaffiliation from the secular world.[39] It was a garment emblematic of Catholic privilege and authority, building on a paradigm of clerics setting themselves apart as superiors instead of integration and association as equals to their flock. The global shifts initiated by the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) contributed to a change of mindset and a more communitarian vision of the Church as a community of all people, and laypeople as equals to the clergy.

Although the changes responded to the evolution of the global Church, they should also be understood as an adaptation to the circumstances on the island. The newly adopted sartorial style and clothing illustrate the changing patterns of religious identification in Cuba. In the everyday of the socialist society, particularly in the mid- and late 1970s, religious clothing constituted a particular category of materiality in the Cuban society by clergy and religious orders by which religion penetrated the public space of the socialist society in a visible manner. The changing standards for clerical clothing also reflected generational differences and shifts: among both the clergy and the laity, younger generations flexibly constructed new sartorial identities to respond to the revolutionary policies, signalling increasing acceptance of the prevailing socio-political norms.[40]

Such stances characterised the emerging generation of Cuban theologians and clerics in the mid-1970s. Prior to the Revolution, the majority of clergy residing in Cuba had been of Spanish nationality. Following the deportation of foreign clergy and religious from the island in 1961, a decision taken by the government in the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs invasion and the radicalisation of the Revolution, the Church had lost two-thirds of its clergy. This eventually led to the emergence of a new generation of Cuban clergy, which also received their theological and pastoral education in the post-revolutionary context on the island (Kuivala 2019, 200–215).

For the new generation of young clerics, the first generation of Cuban theologians to receive their education after the start of the Revolution and in the post-

conciliar Catholic Church, the more casual sartorial identity became a medium to realign and redefine a deeper discourse on the role of the institutional Church in Cuban society among both Catholics and non-Catholics. For the gradual easing of Church-State tensions, particularly relevant was the context in which the young clergy and seminarians decided against wearing clerical vestments in the first place: when doing voluntary work in the Cuban countryside, specifically in the sugar harvest.[41] Voluntary work being considered an epitomic symbol of integration into the revolutionary process, the young generation of clergy demonstrated an active commitment to both religious beliefs and revolutionary norms of life.

In the 1970s, young sisters in religious orders were also permitted by their local superiors to refrain from wearing their signature habits when working in state-run hospitals or tasks otherwise affiliated with social work in state institutions.[42] This served two purposes: the fact that their presence at state hospitals was only approved of on the condition that they would not wear clothing that would distinguish them as religious, and the fact that the sisters found that their professional abilities to receive more appraisal from both their colleagues and their patients when they did not show apparent signs of religious affiliations.[43] It also reflected the sisters' perception that both the Church and the State recognised women in religious orders as a crucial bridge from the Church to society, committed to social work in the existing socio-economic reality while belonging to a religious community.

By revising Catholic sartorial identities, the clergy and members of religious orders navigated the norms of accepted and rejected forms of citizenry, the parameters of social behaviour and the public performance of state socialism. As the above examples suggest, the disaffiliation with Catholic material religions, namely sartorial identities, was also a mechanism of accommodation with the socialist state.

At the same time, as institutional religion became excluded from the state ideology and was scarcely visible in public spaces, the ownership of religious material culture began to shift from the Church to individual Catholics and cohorts in ordained ministry and the laity alike. The shift was apparent in the ways laypeople assumed agency in sustaining material religiosity and spirituality in local communities. As a shift from the previous decade's strongly institutional, nationally coordinated Catholic activities, individual Catholics and local communities organised, for instance, gatherings for praying the rosary as well as for exchanging religious literature and facilitating discussions, including exhibitions of Catholic art.[44] To facilitate these activities, some laypeople stole supplies, such as paper and ink, from state-run workplaces, which they used to print and distribute religious study materials.[45]

These examples suggest that more than a decade after the socialist turn, lay Catholics were still balancing their overlapping identities as Cubans and Catholics although the two were not used synonymously in the revolutionary vocabulary. In doing so, material culture was a means to construct and make visible both resistance and accommodation to the everyday performance of the state-sanctioned citizenship: laypeople considered the acts as small and quotidian, yet persistent, manifestations of resistance to the daily compliance to state power. While they held their Catholic identity in high esteem, they also underscored their commitment to behaving as respectful, law-abiding and integrated citizens without subscribing to the socialist state ideology.

Yet material Catholicism was also a means to facilitate more institutional forms of dialogue and cooperation with the Cuban state. In the mid-to-late 1970s, Marian material culture was a recurring bridge between the Church and society. In 1978, the feast of the Virgen de La Caridad celebrated in Havana at the virgin's shrine in the archdiocese was a rare occasion that allowed bringing together the Cuban clergy, lay-people from Havana, and representatives of the revolutionary government (Gómez Treto 1988, 98–99). The fact that government representatives participated in the event attests to the importance of La Caridad, despite the reinforced public emphasis on material atheism. The event suggests that material religion revolving around *la patrona* still constituted a shared space for the Church and the State.

In the same period, a spontaneously organised procession dedicated to the Virgin Mary convened on the streets of Holguín without authorisation from either the state or the Church. Regardless of the lack of institutional approval, eyewitnesses recount as many as thousands of citizens flocking the streets to see the local effigy of the Virgin – with whom many were familiar since the pre-revolutionary period – carried on the streets.[46] Different from the previous example, this was a clear act of resistance to the state. By doing so, religious Cubans used material religion to defy the materialist worldview introduced by the Cuban state as well as the ownership and control of the state over the public space.

These ad hoc processions also suggest that practices of material religion were collective expressions in which material representations emphasised the nature of faith as a shared, unifying experience. In such ways, religious material culture not only reflected but also constructed the world of belief: the public events became a symbol of presence for the Catholic community within the socialist society. This took place both as a top-down process, in institutionally sanctioned displays of material culture that represent officially canonised saints and their veneration through religious artefacts, and as a bottom-up development, originating at the grassroots level, based on material practices that are not normative or legitimised by religious authorities but emerge from the lived reality of the socialist society instead.

At the same time, the processions demonstrate the coexistence of religious and state institutions and publics and their mutual inclusiveness. As had been demonstrated in 1959, Marian devotion both sat tightly in the revolutionary everyday and peaked as a recurring public expression of identity and agency of Cubans with more or less public religious beliefs. The material embodiment of the nation's *patrona* was considered both a symbol of religion as a unifying presence, and a force that harnessed the potential for catalysing change in the revolutionary everyday. As such, the recurring devotion suggested that in spite of the rupture between the Church and state, more subtle patterns of continuity subsisted on quotidian and existential levels. On occasions such as the 1978 celebration of La Caridad in Havana, material religion made visible a deeper undercurrent of sustained spirituality within the socialist society.

Discussion

By analysing the central role of material religion in Catholic meaning-making practices in revolutionary Cuba, and in the evolution of the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Cuban state, this article argues that material culture

played a vital intermediary role between religious and revolutionary affiliations in the Cuban socialist society.

At the centre of the article are the intersections of material religion and religious identities with the revolutionary culture in the socialist society. As this article shows, the Catholic Church and individual Catholics used material religion to navigate religious life both within and outside the frameworks of the Revolution. By material religion, Cuban Catholics signalled both resistance and accommodation to state power and normative social behaviour. Material religion was also a means that helped navigate the boundaries of public discourse in the daily performances of citizenship. As deeper currents of the Cuban experience, material culture articulated different perspectives on the sacred, the transcendent, and the divine.

In the case of Cuba, particularly relevant for the discourse on and performance of the Revolution by Catholic citizens is the merging of religious and national identities and their material representations. For future scholarship, this nexus presents an invitation to re-evaluate the analytical categories in which religion is often placed in the histories of the Revolution. Instead of considering the material expressions of religion solely as critically outside of the revolutionary reality, it is also necessary to reframe them as inherently Cuban expressions from within the lived spheres of the Revolution. Further study of both Cuban Catholic traditions and material culture would provide new openings into the histories of lived experiences in the Revolution and shed light on the deeper, existential undercurrents of the revolutionary experience.

NOTES

1. My work is the first discussion in scholarship of written sources from the archives of the Catholic Church in Cuba dating to the post-revolutionary period. As the archival collections from 1959 on the island have generally remained classified and unavailable to scholars, these sources mark a significant step forward in Cuba scholarship based on primary sources on the island, providing a wealth of new information on actors and voices recounting experiences from within the revolutionary reality.
2. These were semi-structured, prearranged interviews with multiple ranks of ecclesial affiliation, including clerics, members of religious orders, and laypeople. The interviews were conducted in both urban and rural settings in 2015–2017. When referring to the oral histories, they are treated as anonymous and referred to by numerals as per agreement between the interviewer and the interviewees, many of whom considered anonymity as a prerequisite for agreeing to be interviewed in the first place.
3. For scholarship addressing the Catholic Church and Catholicism in Cuba since 1959 see, for instance, Crahan (1979, 1985, 1990, 2008); Crahan and Armony (2007); Kirk (1989); Pedraza (2007); Super (2003).
4. According to Miller, the study of material religion is particularly important for understanding religion and its "devotional impact", as well as for bringing forth underrepresented actors in Catholic history (2015, 15).
5. For instance, *La Quincena* 1-2, January 1959, Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, Havana, Cuba; *La Quincena* 3, February 1959, Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, Havana, Cuba; *La Quincena* 7, April 1959, Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, Havana, Cuba; *La Quincena* 14, July 1959, Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, Havana, Cuba; *La Quincena* 17, September

1959, Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, Havana, Cuba; *La Quincena* 21-22, November 1959, Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, Havana, Cuba; *La Quincena* 2, January 1960, Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, Havana, Cuba; *La Quincena* 6, March 1960, Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, Havana, Cuba; *La Quincena* 9, May 1960, Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, Havana, Cuba; *La Quincena* 13, July 1960, Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, Havana, Cuba; *La Quincena* 17, September 1960, Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, Havana, Cuba; *La Quincena* 21, November 1960, Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, Havana, Cuba, *La Quincena* 23–24, December 1960, Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, Havana, Cuba.

6. For a broader discussion on the construction of a new revolutionary culture, see Guerra (2012).
7. For revolutionary material culture and national identity, see Pérez (1999); for the construction of revolutionary material culture, see Cabrera Arús (2018).
8. Guerra (2012, 72–73, 99); Cabrera Arús (2018).
9. For a discussion on identification through clothing in the revolutionary society, see Cabrera Arús and Suquet (2019).
10. For a discussion on the changing gender roles and the politics of the family of the Cuban government in the early 1960s, see Chase (2015). For a discussion on the ideas of femininity and family in Cuban Catholicism in the early years of the Revolution and the socialist state in Cuba, see Kuivala (2019, 121–123).
11. For an ethnography of the diasporic devotion to the Virgen de la Caridad among Cuban Catholics in Miami, United States, see Tweed (1997).
12. Homilía del Santo Padre [Juan Pablo II], Misa en Santiago, January 24, 1998; for a discussion on the racial iconography of the Virgen de la Caridad, see Schmidt (2015, 114–117, 141).
13. Miembros del Ejército Rebelde llevaron la preciosa carga hasta el altar y comenzó la Santa Misa. Congreso Católico, Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, Havana, Cuba.
14. Congreso Católico, Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, Havana, Cuba.
15. Oral history interview no. 1 by the author in Cuba, 2015; oral history interview no. 2 by the author in Cuba, 2015; oral history interview no. 11 by the author in Cuba, 2016; oral history interview no. 22 by the author in Cuba, 2017; oral history interview no. 27 by the author in Cuba, 2017.
16. For the nationalisation of ecclesial premises, see Conde (1999, 34–36); Kuivala (2019, 106–110).
17. Oral history interview no. 2 by the author in Cuba, 2015; oral history interview no. 4 in Cuba, 2015; oral history interview no. 21 by the author in Cuba, 2017; oral history interview no. 24 by the author in Cuba, 2017.
18. Oral history interview no. 2 by the author in Cuba, 2015.
19. The Holy See refers to the jurisdiction and central governance of the global Catholic Church. It comprises the highest ecclesial authority of the Catholic Church, consisting of the Pope and the Roman Curia. The Holy See also refers to the sovereign entity of international law, including a diplomatic corps.
20. República de Cuba, Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores to Cesare Zacchi, July 4, 1963, Santa Sede 1963, Archivo Central de Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Havana, Cuba; Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores to Mons. César Zacchi, July 4, 1963, Archivo Central de Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Havana, Cuba; Amado Palenque to Raúl Roa, October 2, 1964, Archivo Central de Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Havana, Cuba; oral history interview no. 11 by the author in Cuba, 2016.
21. Oral history interview no. 11 by the author in Cuba, 2016.

22. For instance, Congreso Católico Nacional, Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, Havana, Cuba; Una demostración sin precedente, *Diario de la Marina*, November 29, 1959, Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, Havana, Cuba.
23. For instance, Junta Nacional 1959, Acción Católica Cubana, Archivo Histórico del Arzobispado de La Habana, Havana, Cuba; Circular no. 2, February 1960 Junta Nacional, Acción Católica Cubana, Archivo Histórico del Arzobispado de La Habana, Havana, Cuba; Organo Oficial de la Acción Católica Cubana, no. 4, 1961, Archivo Histórico del Arzobispado de La Habana, Havana, Cuba.
24. For instance, Guerra (2012, 75–77, 212, 302–303).
25. Oral history interview no. 4 by the author in Cuba, 2015; oral history interview no. 11 by the author in Cuba, 2016; oral history interview no. 23 by the author in Cuba, 2017; for CDRs and religion, see Guerra (2012, 211).
26. Oral history interview no. 2 by the author in Cuba, 2015.
27. Oral history interview no. 22 by the author in Cuba, 2017.
28. Oral history interview no. 11 by the author in Cuba, 2016.
29. Oral history interview no. 14 by the author in Cuba, 2016. See also Schmidt (2015, 232).
30. Cruzada de la Oración a Jesús por María, Junta Diocesana / Matanzas, Acción Católica Cubana, Archivo Histórico del Arzobispado de La Habana, Havana, Cuba; Una moderna campaña de oración bajo la inspiración de la Virgen de la Caridad, Patrona del Pueblo de Cuba, Junta Diocesana / Matanzas, Acción Católica Cubana, Archivo Histórico del Arzobispado de La Habana, Havana, Cuba; Jesús por María: Esta familia es miembro de la Cruzada de la Oración, Junta Diocesana / Matanzas, Acción Católica Cubana, Archivo Histórico del Arzobispado de La Habana, Havana, Cuba; Cruzada de la Oración: Oración Junta Diocesana / Matanzas, Acción Católica Cubana, Archivo Histórico del Arzobispado de La Habana, Havana, Cuba; Cruzada de la Oración: Promesa, Junta Diocesana / Matanzas, Acción Católica Cubana, Archivo Histórico del Arzobispado de La Habana, Havana, Cuba.
31. AHAH AC JD M Cruzada de la Oración a Jesús por María. Una moderna campaña de oración bajo la inspiración de la Virgen de la Caridad, Patrona del Pueblo de Cuba;
32. AHAH AC JD M Cruzada de la Oración a Jesús por María. Una moderna campaña de oración bajo la inspiración de la Virgen de la Caridad, Patrona del Pueblo de Cuba;
33. Archivo Histórico del Arzobispado de La Habana, Havana, Cuba.
34. Organización: plano parroquial, 20 septiembre 1965, Junta Nacional, Acción Católica Cubana, Archivo Histórico del Arzobispado de La Habana, Havana, Cuba.
35. Constitución de la República de Cuba 1976; Curso de Catequesis para Catequistas, Catequesis, Archivo del Seminario San Carlos y Ambrosio, Guanabacoa, Cuba; Gómez Treto 1988, 89–90.
36. Material de Estudio, Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Cuba, Archivo Histórico del Arzobispado de La Habana, Havana, Cuba; Mesa-Lago (1978, 105).
37. Material de Estudio, Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Cuba, Archivo Histórico del Arzobispado de La Habana, Havana, Cuba; Kuivala (2019, 199).
38. "Para una teología y pastoral de reconcialición desde Cuba por Padre Rene David, Teología y pastoral de la reconciliación." P. Rene David. Private Archive of Father José Félix Pérez Riera.
39. Oral history interview no. 14 by the author in Cuba, 2016; Gómez Treto (1988, 58); Kuivala (2019, 213).
40. Oral history interview no. 23 by the author in Cuba, 2017; oral history interview no. 24 by the author in Cuba, 2017.

41. Seminaristas A-7, p. 11 Servicio al pueblo; REC Opiniones Matanzas, Archivo Histórico del Arzobispado de La Habana, Havana, Cuba; Cuestionario de prensa 20.4.1981 / Pedro Meurice Estíu 9.5.1981, Cartas pastorales, Archivo de la Conferencia de Obispos Católicos de Cuba, Havana, Cuba; oral history interview no. 24 by the author in Cuba, 2017; Gómez Treto (1988, 58).
42. Oral history interview no. 14 by the author in Cuba, 2016.
43. Oral history interview no. 14 by the author in Cuba, 2016.
44. Oral history interview no. 24 by the author in Cuba, 2017.
45. ¿Quién eres tú, Jesús de Nazareth? Cursillo teológico, Diócesis de Oriente, Archivo Personal de Juan Varela (pseudonym), Cuba; oral history interview no. 23 by the author in Cuba, 2017; oral history interview no. 24 by the author in Cuba, 2017; oral history interview no. 26 by the author in Cuba, 2017.
46. Oral history interview no. 26 by the author in Cuba, 2017.

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